

STUDIES IN FLORIDA BOTANY

7. A Note on Basiphyllaea corallicola (Small) Ames

Alex D. Hawkes

Basiphyllaea corallicola (Small) Ames Sched. Orch. 7 (19-24) 1.

In 1910 Dr. John K. Small, student of the southeastern flora of the United States, published a new species of orchid to which he gave the name Carteria corallicola (in TORREYA 10:188). Fourteen years later in the seventh fascicle of his serial SCHEDULAE ORCHIDIANAE, Oakes Ames made a new combination for this plant, and had the following to say regarding its status: "As the generic name Carteria is valid for a genus of the Algae I have referred Carteria corallicola to Basiphyllaea, a genus proposed by Schlechter (in FEDDE REPERT. 17 (1921) 76) for the reception of a Cuban species formerly placed in Tetramicra."

This unusual terrestrial orchid is today one of the rarest of all our Florida indigenes. The writer has never seen it in the wild, and the few specimens available in herbaria are of notably poor quality and sparse quantity, indicative of a scarcity everywhere. It has been found in the Bahamas, but, though two other species of the small genus (B. sarcophylla (Rehb.f.) Schltr., and B. angustifolia Schltr.) are known from Cuba, our plant has not been located there as yet..

The following brief notes concerning this excessively rare orchid are made from the original description published by Small in the citation above, as no other material was available from which a more complete diagnosis could be drawn.

Basiphyllaea corallicola is a solitary-stemmed, ground-dwelling plant with thick rather slim stems attaining a height of as much as 5 dm, with a few basal leaves produced near the ground. These leaves are rather linear, somewhat curved, and attenuated at both ends. The small flowers are borne on an erect, rather inconspicuous spike and are greenish or greenish-white with a yellowish lip, which has magenta or magenta-pink lobes.

The sepals, generally green or greenish-yellow in color, measure up to 7.5 mm long and are broadly linear to linear-lanceolate in shape. The petals, more often of a greenish-white hue, are about the same size, and linear. The oval or orbicular-oval lip, up to 7 mm long, is yellowish on the disc, which has several crests extending to the base of the middle lobe, and magenta or pinkish-magenta on the lobes. A magenta anther is borne above the trilobate stigma.

In his original discussion, Dr. Small likened this plant to Triphora, and stated as follows: "Carteria is related to Triphora, but differs in the position of the flowers, and the lip, as described above, and in the short column, the prominently 3-lobed stigma which is thick and spongy at the base, and the inconspicuous anther-connective." The original habitat is given as, "In pinelands, Everglades Keys, Florida. Also in the Bahamas. Type collected about 2 miles NE of the point where the old trail crosses Long Prairie, Oct. 31, 1906., J.K. Small, J.J. Carter, A.A. Eaton."

It is hoped that subsequent collectors in southern Florida will find this intriguing little orchid again, and that its extreme rarity in herbaria will be somewhat dispelled by their gatherings. It is improbable that it will thrive under cultivation.